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**Wang et al.**

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(54) **METHOD OF MAKING A PROBE TIP**

250/305, 306, 307; 405/29, 15, 21; 324/754;  
977/DIG. 1, 762, 766, 768

(75) Inventors: **Zhong L. Wang**, Marietta, GA (US);  
**William L. Hughes**, Atlanta, GA (US);  
**Brent A. Buchine**, Smyrna, GA (US)

See application file for complete search history.

(73) Assignee: **Georgia Tech Research Corporation**,  
Atlanta, GA (US)

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(\*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this  
patent is extended or adjusted under 35  
U.S.C. 154(b) by 515 days.

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*Primary Examiner* — Derris H Banks

(22) Filed: **Jun. 10, 2008**

*Assistant Examiner* — Tai Nguyen

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

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(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Bryan W. Bockhop;  
Bockhop & Associates, LLC

**Related U.S. Application Data**

(57) **ABSTRACT**

(62) Division of application No. 11/352,535, filed on Feb.  
13, 2006, now Pat. No. 7,408,366.

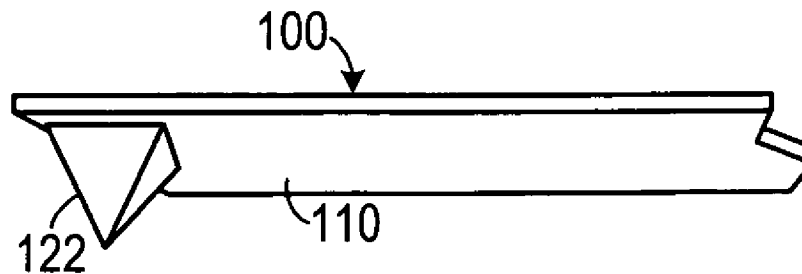
A probe includes a substrate and a tetragonal structure dis-  
posed on the substrate that has four end points. Three of the  
end points are disposed adjacent to the substrate. A fourth of  
the end points extends outwardly and substantially normal to  
the substrate. In a method of making a probe tip, a plurality of  
tetrapods are grown and at least one of the tetrapods is placed  
on a substrate at a selected location. The tetrapod is affixed to  
the substrate at the selected location.

(51) **Int. Cl.**  
**H01S 4/00** (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** ..... **29/592.1**; 29/832; 29/831; 29/837;  
29/854; 29/857

(58) **Field of Classification Search** ..... 29/592.1,  
29/854, 832, 831, 857, 860, 863, 837; 73/105;

**20 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets**



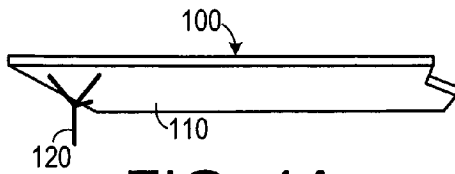


FIG. 1A

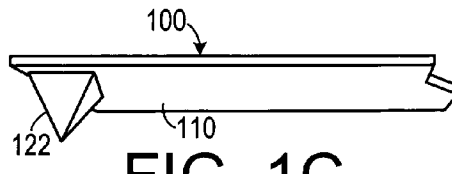


FIG. 1C

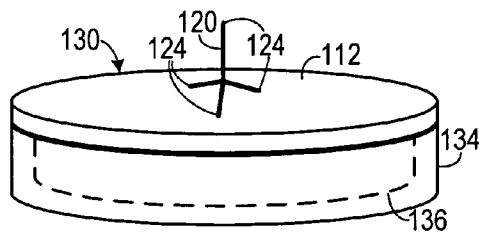


FIG. 1B

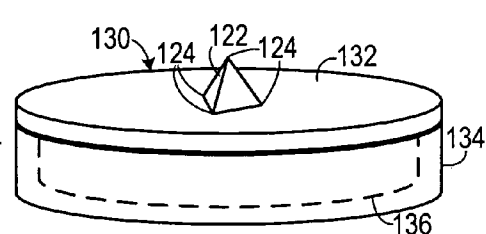


FIG. 1D

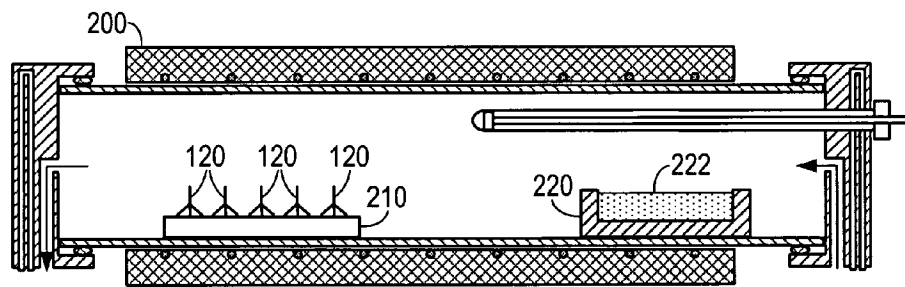


FIG. 2

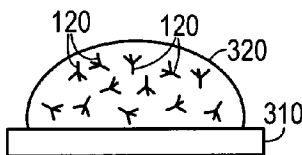


FIG. 3A

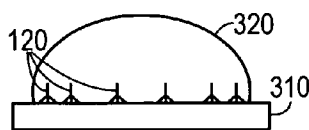


FIG. 3B

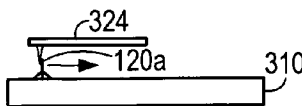


FIG. 3C

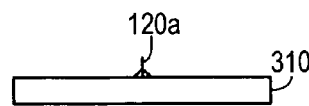


FIG. 3D

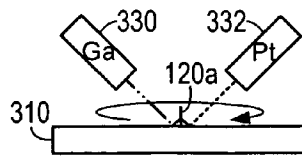
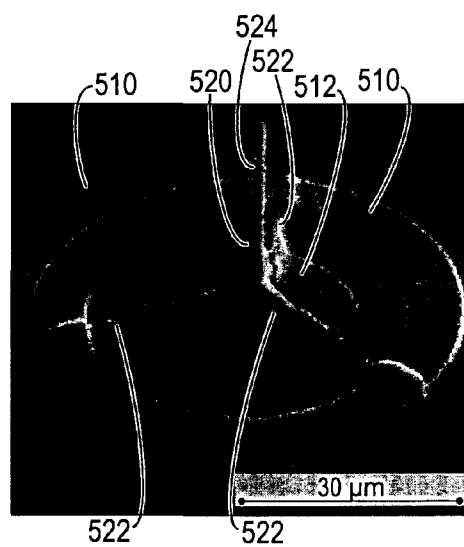
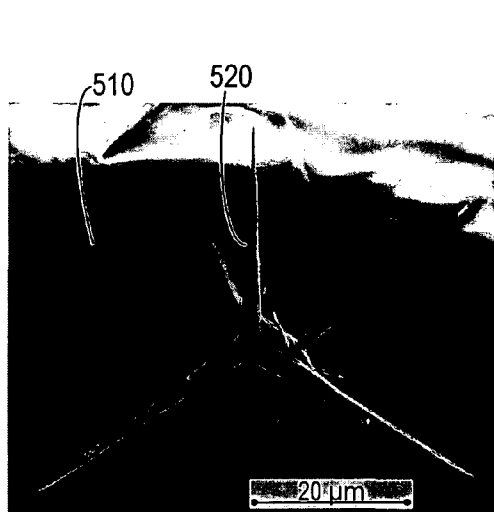
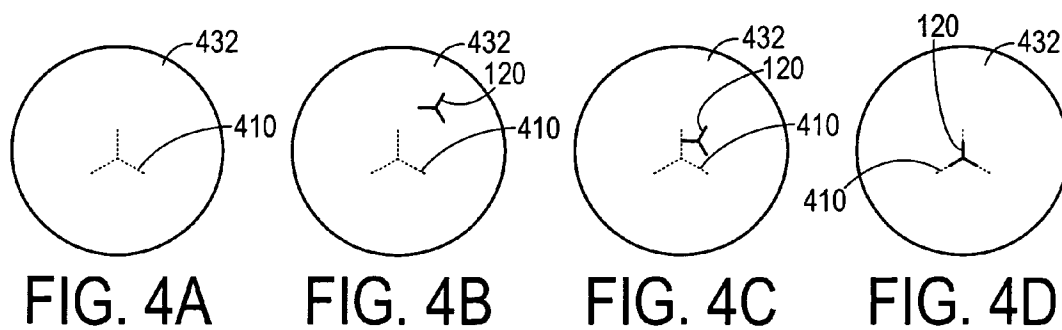


FIG. 3E



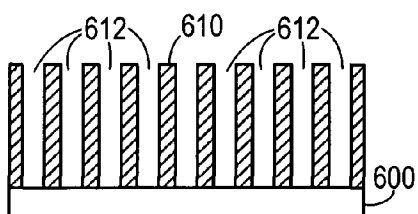


FIG. 6A

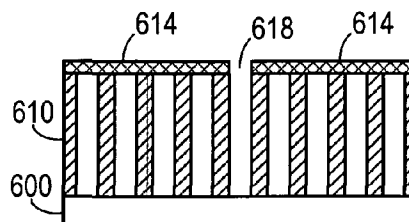


FIG. 6B

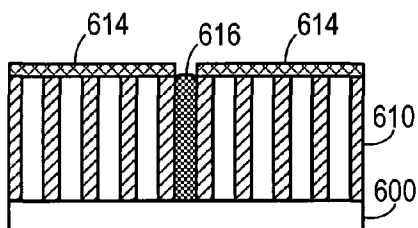


FIG. 6C

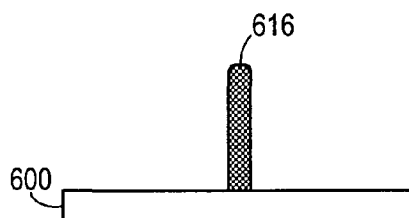


FIG. 6D

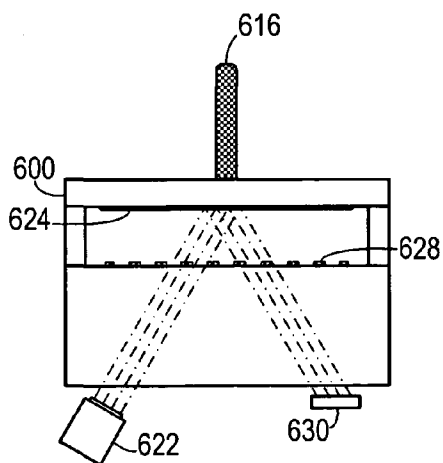


FIG. 6E

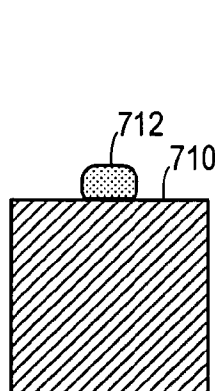


FIG. 7A

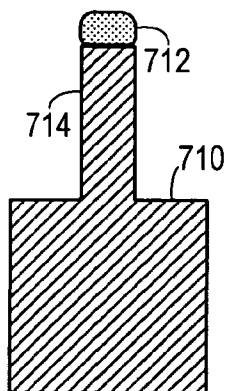


FIG. 7B

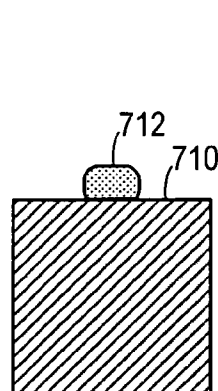


FIG. 8A

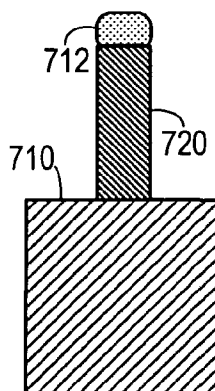


FIG. 8B

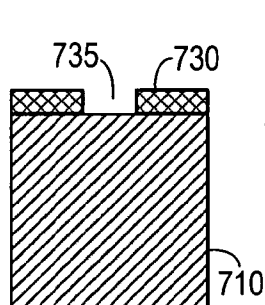


FIG. 9A

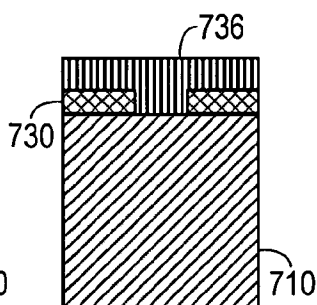


FIG. 9B

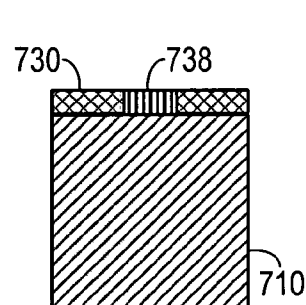


FIG. 9C

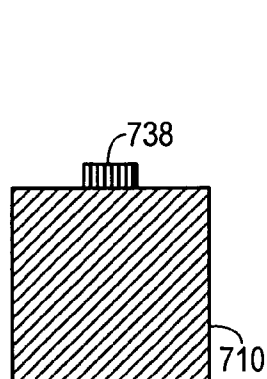


FIG. 9D

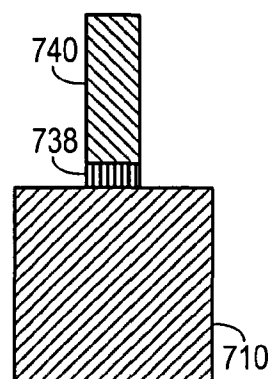


FIG. 9E

1

**METHOD OF MAKING A PROBE TIP****CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION(S)**

This application is a divisional of, and claims the benefit of, U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/352,535, filed Feb. 13, 2006, Now, U.S. Pat. No. 7,408,366 the entirety of which is hereby incorporated herein by reference.

**STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT INTEREST**

This invention was made with support from the U.S. government under grant number ECS-0210332, awarded by National Science Foundation. The government may have certain rights in the invention.

**BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION****1. Field of the Invention**

The present invention relates to probe tips and, more specifically, probe tips used in atomic force microscopy and the like.

**2. Description of the Prior Art**

Atomic Force Microscopes (AFM) are used to measure surface characteristics of materials at the nano scale. AFM's are useful in measuring thin and thick film coatings, ceramics, composites, glasses, synthetic and biological membranes, metals, polymers, and semiconductors, among other things. By using an AFM one can not only image the surface with near atomic resolution but can also measure the forces of the surface of a sample at the nano-Newton scale.

An AFM typically includes a probe with a probe tip extending therefrom. One type of probe is a cantilever; another is a force sensing integrated readout and active tip (FIRAT) probe. A cantilever includes a beam with a probe tip at a distal end. The beam may be angularly deflected to move the probe tip toward the object being measured. When the probe tip begins to interact with the object, the deflection of the beam can be measured by sensing light from a laser reflected off of the beam. A FIRAT probe includes a membrane that is supported by a frame. A FIRAT probe tip is typically affixed to the center of the membrane. The membrane may be displaced vertically by one of several methods. In one such method, the membrane has a first conductive surface that is spaced apart from a second conductive surface. When a similar charge is applied to both the first conductive surface and the second conductive surface, the two surfaces repel each other, thereby forcing the membrane (and the probe tip) away from the second conductive surface. The vertical displacement of the probe tip is controlled in this way. The vertical displacement of the membrane is detected by reflecting light from a laser off of the membrane and passing the reflected light through a diffraction grating and then measuring the intensity of one or more modes of the diffracted light using a photodetector.

Probe tips should be hard relative to the object being measured and should have a high aspect ratio. (Aspect ratio is the ratio of the longest dimension of a probe tip to its widest dimension. Thus, something with a high aspect ratio is long and thin.) Also, once mounted, a probe tip should be substantially normal to the probe surface.

With current AFM probe designs, forming and mounting the probe tip is a relatively costly process. Typical methods of making probe tips including cleaving hard crystals to form sharp shards and then gluing the shards to a probe surface.

2

Such methods are complicated and time consuming. Also, getting the probe tip to be normal to the probe surface can be difficult.

Therefore, there is a need for method of making a self-aligned probe tip that is always substantially normal to the probe surface.

There is also a need for a method of making probe tips that have a high aspect ratio.

There is also a need for a method of making probe tips economically.

**SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION**

The disadvantages of the prior art are overcome by the present invention which, in one aspect, is a probe that includes a substrate and a tetragonal structure disposed on the substrate. The tetragonal structure has four end points, with three of the end points disposed adjacent to the substrate. A fourth of the end points extends outwardly and substantially normal to the substrate.

In another aspect, the invention is a method of making a probe tip in which a plurality of tetrapods are grown. At least one of the tetrapods is placed on a substrate at a selected location. The tetrapod is affixed to the substrate at the selected location.

In yet another aspect, the invention is a method of making a probe that includes a substrate. A nano-wire is grown from a selected surface of a substrate, thereby forming a probe tip. The substrate is affixed to a probe structure, thereby making the probe.

These and other aspects of the invention will become apparent from the following description of the preferred embodiments taken in conjunction with the following drawings. As would be obvious to one skilled in the art, many variations and modifications of the invention may be effected without departing from the spirit and scope of the novel concepts of the disclosure.

**BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES OF THE DRAWINGS**

FIG. 1A is a perspective view of a tetrapod probe tip affixed to a cantilever beam.

FIG. 1B is a perspective view of a tetrahedral probe tip affixed to a cantilever beam.

FIG. 1C is a perspective view of a tetrapod probe tip affixed to a membrane-type probe.

FIG. 1D is a perspective view of a tetrahedral probe tip affixed to a membrane-type probe.

FIG. 2 is a cross-sectional view of a tube furnace used in making tetrapod probe tips.

FIGS. 3A-3E are side view schematic diagrams showing one method of securing a tetrapod to a probe surface.

FIGS. 4A-4D are top view schematic diagrams showing one method of moving a tetrapod to a preselected location and a preselected orientation.

FIG. 5A-5B are micrographs of tetrapods.

FIG. 6A-6E are side view schematic diagrams demonstrating a first method for growing a nano-wire probe tip.

FIG. 7A-7B are side view schematic diagrams demonstrating a second method for growing a nano-wire probe tip.

FIG. 8A-8B are side view schematic diagrams demonstrating a third method for growing a nano-wire probe tip.

FIG. 9A-9E are side view schematic diagrams demonstrating a fourth method for growing a nano-wire probe tip.

**DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION**

A preferred embodiment of the invention is now described in detail. Referring to the drawings, like numbers indicate like

parts throughout the views. As used in the description herein and throughout the claims, the following terms take the meanings explicitly associated herein, unless the context clearly dictates otherwise: the meaning of "a," "an," and "the" includes plural reference, the meaning of "in" includes "in" and "on."

As shown in FIGS. 1A-1D, one illustrative embodiment of the invention includes a probe that has a substrate and a tetragonal structure on the substrate. The probes shown in FIGS. 1A and 1C are cantilever-type probes **100** that have beam-type substrates **110**. The probes shown in FIGS. 1B and 1D are membrane-type probes **130**, such as FIRAT (Force sensing Integrated Readout and Active Tip) probes. A membrane-type probe **130** includes a housing **134** that defines a cavity **136** therein. A membrane substrate **112** is supported by the housing **134**. Displacement of the substrate **112** is measured optically by reflecting a light beam off of the substrate **112**. FIRAT probes are disclosed in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/260,238, filed on Oct. 28, 2005, the entirety of which is incorporated herein by reference.

The tetragonal structures shown in FIGS. 1A and 1B are tetrapods **120**. A tetrapod is a three-dimensional geometric shape that contains four extremities (feet, legs, or leg-like appendages) that which extend from a central location. The tetragonal structures shown in FIGS. 1C and 1D are tetrahedrons **122**. A tetrahedron (triangular pyramid) is a polyhedron that has four faces, four vertices, and six edges. The tetragonal structures used in this embodiment have four end points **124**, three of which are disposed adjacent to the substrate **110** or **112** and the fourth end point extends outwardly and is substantially normal to the substrate.

In one embodiment, shown in FIG. 2, tetrapods **120** are grown in a reaction chamber, such as a tube furnace **200**. To grow tetrapods **120**, a precursor **222** is placed in a crucible **220** in the tube furnace **200** and a substrate **210**, such as an aluminum substrate, is placed downstream from the precursor **222**. The precursor **222**, and the resulting tetrapod, could be made of a metal oxide, such as zinc oxide. It could also be made from other crystalline substances, such as cadmium telluride. It is understood that any tetrapod of appropriate size falls within the scope of the present invention.

The tube furnace **200** is heated to a preselected temperature for a preselected period of time. The precursor **222** evaporates and is subsequently deposited on the substrate **210**. The crystal form of the structure that grows on the substrate may be controlled by controlling the temperature and pressure inside the tube furnace **200**.

In one experimental example of growing tetrapods, ZnO tetrapod nanostructures were synthesized by thermal evaporation of 99.9% pure zinc powders under controlled conditions without the presence of catalyst. Zinc powder was placed in an alumina crucible that was inserted in a horizontal tube furnace, where the temperature, pressure, and evaporation time were controlled. The temperature of the furnace was ramped to 850-950° C. at a rate of 50° C./min. and kept at that temperature for 1-30 minutes. T-ZnO nanostructures were obtained in the reaction vessel. It should be understood that these parameters are given as one example only and that many other permutations are possible that will generate suitable structures. It is intended that all such permutations will fall within the scope of the claims below.

As shown in FIGS. 3A-3E, the tetrapods **120** can be suspended in a liquid **320**, such as water, alcohol, acetone, or any other substantially non-reactive liquid that is capable of suspending the tetrapods **120**. The liquid **320** is placed on a substrate **310** and the tetrapods **120** are allowed to settle onto the substrate **320**. The liquid **320** is allowed to evaporate from

the substrate **310** and the tetrapods **120** naturally settle with three of the endpoints resting on the substrate **310**. A selected one of the tetrapods **120a** can be moved to a selected location (such as the center) of the substrate **310** using an atomic force microscope (or by using one of several other types of known microscopy and manipulation techniques). The selected tetrapod **120a** is then attached to the substrate **310** by applying a precursor **332**, such as platinum, and a focused ion beam **330**, such as a gallium ion beam, or an electron beam, to an area adjacent the endpoints of the selected tetrapod **120a**, thereby forming a focused beam assisted bond. While this is occurring, the substrate **310** is rotated, thereby bonding each of the endpoints to the substrate **310**. This method of bonding has the advantage of operating at a relatively low temperature, thereby not harming other components of the probe. In one embodiment, the substrate **310** is a membrane of an already existing probe, in another embodiment, the substrate **310** is attached to the probe after the tetrapod **120a** is attached to the substrate **310**. While the bond shown is platinum, it could include one of several materials, such as: metals, semiconductors, oxides, and polymers. Materials used could include: platinum, tungsten, quartz, and carbon.

One manner of facilitating placement of the tetrapod **120** in the center, or other desired location, of a substrate **432** is shown in FIGS. 4A-4D. Initially, a pattern **410** corresponding to a vertical projection of the tetrapod is placed on the substrate at the preselected location. The pattern **410** comprises a substance that is attractive to the tetrapod, such as an amphiphile (e.g., thiol) and may be printed onto the substrate using well known micro-scale marking techniques. As the tetrapod **120** is brought near the projection **410**, it is attracted to the projection **410** and eventually settles on the projection **410**, as shown in FIG. 4D, with the desired orientation.

A micrograph of a tetrapod **520** resting on a substrate **510** is shown in FIG. 5A. A micrograph of a tetrapod **520** affixed to a substrate **510** is shown in FIG. 5B. This micrograph shows three base legs **522** of the tetrapod **520** with an outer layer of platinum **510** and an inner layer of platinum **512** acting as a bond and holding the legs **522** to the substrate **510**. In this manner a probe leg **524** extends outwardly from, and substantially normal to the substrate **510**.

A common characteristic of tetragonal structures is that when they are placed onto any smooth (flat or curved) solid surface, three of the four extremities will contact the substrate surface while the fourth will be free and orthogonal to the surface. This provides the advantage of creating a self-aligned probe tip.

In an alternate embodiment of the invention, a nano-wire probe tip may be grown onto a substrate. In one illustrative embodiment of a method for growing a nano-wire at a selected position, shown in FIGS. 6A-6D, a porous anodized aluminum oxide membrane **610** is formed on a substrate **600**, so that the channels **612** extend vertically from the substrate **600**. All of the channels **612** except for preselected channels **618** are covered with a mask material **614**, as shown in FIG. 6B. A nano-wire **616** is grown from the substrate **600** in the exposed channel **616** using a process such as electro-deposition, as shown in FIG. 6C. The anodized aluminum oxide membrane **610** and the mask material **614** are removed by etching, leaving the nano-wire **616**, as shown in FIG. 6D. The substrate **600** can be part of a probe surface, such as the membrane-type probe shown in FIG. 6E. Such a probe typically includes a reflective surface **624** on the substrate membrane **600** disposed oppositely from the probe tip **616**. A light source **622** such as a semiconductor laser, directs a beam of light at the reflective surface **624**, which reflects the beam through a diffraction grating **628** to a photodetector **630**. The

5

intensity of the detected light indicates the position, and thus displacement, of the membrane **600**.

Porous anodic aluminum oxide (AAO) membranes can have channel diameters as small as a few nanometers with short channel-to-channel distances that can be controlled easily by varying the anodizing conditions. Highly ordered, straight nanopores, or channels, in hexagonally close-packed arrays can be fabricated with very high aspect ratios. AAO membranes can be made directly on aluminum substrates. They may also be fabricated on substrates other than aluminum by first removing the aluminum backing and attaching them to other materials during an additional processing step.

In another method of growing a probe tip, as shown in FIGS. 7A and 7B, a catalyst particle **712** is placed on a substrate **710**. A deposition process is used to grow a nano-wire **714**. One of several processes may be used; examples of such processes include: thermal evaporation, metal-organic chemical vapor deposition, pulsed laser deposition, chemical vapor transport and aqueous solution method. The nano-wire **714** shown in FIGS. 7A and 7B is grown by homoepitaxy, in which nano-wire **714** is in crystal continuity with the substrate **710**. In this case a single crystal is grown through solution phase or gas phase synthesis. As shown in FIGS. 8A and 8B, heteroepitaxy may also be employed, wherein the nano-wire **720** is crystallographically distinct from the substrate **710**. As shown in FIGS. 9A-9E, seeded epitaxy may be employed to grow the nano-wire **740**. In this type of process, a mask **730** is placed on the substrate **710** so that an opening **735**, defined through the mask, exposes a selected portion of the substrate **710**. A seed material, which could include the same material as the material from which the nano-wire **740** is to be grown or a catalyst, is applied to the mask layer **730** and the opening **735**. The mask material is removed, e.g. by etching, leaving a seed material nucleus **738**. A nano-wire **740** is then grown from the nucleus **738** using generally known nano-scale chemical deposition methods. Discussions of nano-wire and nano-rod growth may be found in U.S. Pat. Nos. 6,863,943 and 6,940,086, and U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/010,178, filed Dec. 10, 2004, all of which are incorporated herein by reference.

Gas-phase and solution-phase syntheses are two methodologies that which produce vertically-aligned structures. Current examples of gas-phase syntheses techniques are; thermal evaporation, metal-organic chemical vapor deposition (MOCVD), pulsed laser deposition (PLD), and chemical vapor transport (CVT) while the primary example for solution-phase synthesis is the aqueous solution method (ASM). A key requirement for the vertical alignment of such structures, regardless of the methodology and subsequent technique used, is the nucleation-and-growth of the structures onto an epitaxial layer.

The above described embodiments, while including the preferred embodiment and the best mode of the invention known to the inventor at the time of filing, are given as illustrative examples only. It will be readily appreciated that many deviations may be made from the specific embodiments disclosed in this specification without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. Accordingly, the scope of the invention is to be determined by the claims below rather than being limited to the specifically described embodiments above.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of making a probe tip, comprising:

- a. growing a plurality of tetrapods;
- b. placing at least one of the tetrapods on a substrate at a selected location;

6

- c. affixing the tetrapod to the substrate at the selected location;
- d. suspending the at least one tetrapod in a liquid, thereby forming a suspension;
- e. placing the suspension on the substrate; and
- f. allowing the liquid to evaporate, thereby leaving the at least one tetrapod on the substrate.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of attaching the substrate to a probe surface of a probe.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the growing step comprises:

- a. placing a metallic precursor and a substrate in a reaction chamber; and
- b. heating the reaction chamber until at least a portion of the metallic precursor evaporates and precipitates as at least one tetrapod on the substrate.

4. The method of claim 3, wherein the metallic precursor comprises zinc oxide.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the liquid comprises a substance selected from a group consisting essentially of: an alcohol, acetone and water.

6. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of moving the at least one tetrapod to a preselected location on the substrate using a microscopy technique.

7. The method of claim 6, further comprising the step of placing a pattern corresponding to a vertical projection of the at least one tetrapod on the substrate at the preselected location, wherein the pattern comprises an attractive substance that is attractive to the tetrapod.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein the attractive substance comprises an amphiphile.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the tetrapod comprises three base legs in contact with the substrate and a probe leg extending outwardly and substantially normal to the substrate.

10. A method of making a probe tip, comprising:

- a. growing a plurality of tetrapods;
- b. placing at least one of the tetrapods on a substrate at a selected location;
- c. affixing the tetrapod to the substrate at the selected location;
- d. applying a precursor to a portion of the substrate and a portion of the three base legs; and
- e. applying a focused ion beam at an area adjacent to the three base legs.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein the precursor comprises platinum.

12. The method of claim 10, wherein the ion beam comprises a gallium ion beam.

13. The method of claim 10, further comprising the step of attaching the substrate to a probe surface of a probe.

14. The method of claim 10, wherein the growing step comprises:

- a. placing a metallic precursor and a substrate in a reaction chamber; and
- b. heating the reaction chamber until at least a portion of the metallic precursor evaporates and precipitates as at least one tetrapod on the substrate.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein the metallic precursor comprises zinc oxide.

16. The method of claim 10, wherein the placing step comprises:

- a. suspending the at least one tetrapod in a liquid, thereby forming a suspension;
- b. placing the suspension on the substrate; and
- c. allowing the liquid to evaporate, thereby leaving the at least one tetrapod on the substrate.



7

**17.** The method of claim **16**, wherein the liquid comprises a substance selected from a group consisting essentially of: an alcohol, acetone and water.

**18.** The method of claim **16**, further comprising the step of moving the at least one tetrapod to a preselected location on the substrate using a microscopy technique.

**19.** The method of claim **18**, further comprising the step of placing a pattern corresponding to a vertical projection of the

8

at least one tetrapod on the substrate at the preselected location, wherein the pattern comprises an attractive substance that is attractive to the tetrapod.

**20.** The method of claim **19**, wherein the attractive substance comprises an amphiphile.

\* \* \* \* \*